

Essential Question for the Humanities

Decisions, Actions, and Consequences

1. What is the relationship between decisions and consequences?
2. How do we know how to make good decisions?
3. How can a person's decisions and actions change his/her life?
4. How do the decisions and actions of characters reveal their personalities?
5. How do decisions, actions, and consequences vary depending on the different perspectives of the people involved?

Social Justice

1. What is social justice?
2. To what extent does power or the lack of power affect individuals?
3. What is oppression and what are the root causes?
4. How are prejudice and bias created? How do we overcome them?
5. What are the responsibilities of the individual in regard to issues of social justice?
6. How can literature serve as a vehicle for social change?
7. When should an individual take a stand against what he/she believes to be an injustice? What are the most effective ways to do this?
8. What are the factors that create an imbalance of power within a culture?
9. What does power have to do with fairness and justice?
10. When is it necessary to question the status quo? Who decides?
11. What are the benefits and consequences of questioning / challenging social order?
12. How do stereotypes influence how we look at and understand the world?
13. What does it mean to be invisible? (context: minorities)
14. In what ways can a minority keep their issues on the larger culture's "radar screen?"
15. What creates prejudice, and what can an individual overcome it?
16. What are the causes and consequences of prejudice and injustice, and how does an individual's response to them reveal his/her true character?
17. What allows some individuals to take a stand against prejudice/oppression while others choose to participate in it?
18. What are the causes and consequences of prejudice and how does an individual's response to it reveal his/her morals, ethics, and values?

Culture: Values, Beliefs & Rituals

1. How do individuals develop values and beliefs?
2. What factors shape our values and beliefs?
3. How do values and beliefs change over time?
4. How does family play a role in shaping our values and beliefs?

5. Why do we need beliefs and values?
6. What happens when belief systems of societies and individuals come into conflict?
7. When should an individual take a stand in opposition to an individual or larger group?
8. When is it appropriate to challenge the beliefs or values of society?
9. To what extent do belief systems shape and/or reflect culture and society?
10. How are belief systems represented and reproduced through history, literature, art, and music?
11. How do beliefs, ethics, or values influence different people's behavior?
12. How do individuals reconcile competing belief systems within a given society (e.g., moral beliefs conflicting with legal codes)?
13. When a person's individual choices are in direct conflict with his/her society, what are the consequences?
14. What is morality and what are the factors that have an impact on the development of our morality?
15. What role or purpose does religion / spirituality serve in a culture?
16. What purpose or function do ethics / philosophy have in governing technological advances?
17. How do our values and beliefs shape who we are as individuals and influence our behavior?

Adversity, Conflict, and Change

1. How does conflict lead to change?
2. What problem-solving strategies can individuals use to manage conflict and change?
3. How does an individual's point of view affect the way they deal with conflict?
4. What personal qualities have helped you to deal with conflict and change?
5. How might it feel to live through a conflict that disrupts your way of life?
6. How does conflict influence an individual's decisions and actions?
7. How are people transformed through their relationships with others?
8. What is community and what are the individual's responsibility to the community as well as the community's responsibility to the individual?

Utopia and Dystopia

1. How would we define a utopian society?
2. How has the concept of utopia changed over time and/or across cultures or societies?
3. What are the ideals (e.g., freedom, responsibility, justice, community, etc.) that should be honored in a utopian society?
4. Why do people continue to pursue the concept of a utopian society?
5. How do competing notions of what a utopian society should look like lead to conflict?

6. What are the purposes and/or consequence of creating and/or maintaining a dystopian society?
7. What is the relationship between differences and utopia?

Chaos and Order

1. What is the importance of civilization and what factors support or destroy its fabric?
2. What are the positive and negative aspects of both chaos and order?
3. What are the responsibilities and consequences of this new world order described as “global”?
4. What role does chaos play in the creative process?
5. What are the politics and consequences of war, and how do these vary based on an individual or cultural perspective?

Constructing Identities

1. How do we form and shape our identities?
2. In a culture where we are bombarded with ideas and images of “what we should be,”
3. How does one form an identity that remains true and authentic for her/himself?
4. What turning points determine our individual pathways to adulthood?
5. In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?

Creation

1. What is creativity and what is its importance for the individual / the culture?
2. What is art and its function in our lives?
3. What are the limits, if any, of freedom of speech?

Freedom and Responsibility

1. What is freedom?
2. What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility?
3. What are the essential liberties?
4. What is the relationship between privacy, freedom, and security?
5. When does government have the right to restrict the freedoms of people?
6. When is the restriction of freedom a good thing?

Good and Evil in the World

1. Is humankind inherently good or evil?
2. Have the forces of good and evil changed over time and if so, how?
3. How do different cultures shape the definitions of good and evil?

Heroes and “She-roes”

1. Do the attributes of a hero remain the same over time?
2. When does a positive personality trait become a tragic flaw?
3. What is the role of a hero or “she-roe” (coined by Maya Angelou) in a culture?
4. How do various cultures reward / recognize their heroes and “she-roes”?
5. Why is it important for people and cultures to construct narratives about their experience?
6. What is the relevance of studying multicultural texts?
7. How does the media shape our view of the world and ourselves?
8. In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?

The Human Condition / Spirit

1. In the face of adversity, what causes some individuals to prevail while others fail?
2. What is the meaning of life, and does that shape our beliefs regarding death?

Illusion vs. Reality

1. What is reality and how is it constructed?
2. What tools can the individual use to judge the difference, or draw a line between, illusion and reality?

Language & Literature

1. How is our understanding of culture and society constructed through and by language?
2. How can language be powerful?
3. How can you use language to empower yourself?
4. How is language used to manipulate us?
5. In what ways are language and power inseparable?
6. What is the relationship between thinking and language? How close or far are they apart?
7. How does language influence the way we think, act, and perceive the world?
8. How do authors use the resources of language to impact an audience?
9. How is literature like life?
10. What is literature supposed to do?
11. What influences a writer to create?
12. What is the purpose and function of art in our culture?
13. How does literature reveal the values of a given culture or time period?
14. How does the study of fiction and nonfiction texts help individuals construct their understanding of reality?
15. In what ways are all narratives influenced by bias and perspective?

16. Where does the meaning of a text reside? Within the text, within the reader, or in the transaction that occurs between them?
17. What can a reader know about an author's intentions based only on a reading of the text?
18. What are enduring questions and conflicts that writers (and their cultures) grappled with hundreds of years ago and are still relevant today?
19. How do we gauge the optimism or pessimism of a particular time period or particular group of writers?
20. Why are there universal themes in literature—that is, themes that are of interest or concern to all cultures and societies?
21. What are the characteristics or elements that cause a piece of literature to endure?
22. What distinguishes a good read from great literature?
23. Who decides the criteria for judging whether or not a book is any good?
24. What is the purpose of: science fiction? satire? historical novels, etc.?

Love & Sacrifice

1. If any, what are the boundaries of love and sacrifice, and where does one draw the line between them?
2. What are the factors that move individuals / communities / nations to great sacrifice and what are the consequences?

Nature in the Balance

1. What are the responsibilities of the individual / society / superpowers in regard to the health of the environment? (local, regional, national or international context can be used)
2. What are the consequences of being unconcerned with nature's balance/harmony?

Our View of the World and Ourselves

1. How do we know what we know?
2. What is changeable within ourselves?
3. How does what we know about the world shape the way we view ourselves?
4. How do our personal experiences shape our view of others?
5. What does it mean to be an insider or an outsider?
6. What does it mean to "grow up"?
7. Where do our definitions of good and evil come from?
8. What is the relevance of studying multicultural texts?
9. How does the media shape our view of the world and ourselves?
10. In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?
11. What turning points determine our individual pathways to adulthood?

Past, Present, and Future

1. Why do we bother to study/examine the past, present or future?
2. What are the recurrent motifs of history and in what ways have they changed or remained the same?

The Pursuit of Happiness

1. What is happiness, and what is the degree of importance in one's life?
2. To what extent does a culture / society / subculture shape an individual's understanding or concept of happiness?

Relationships and Community

1. What are the elements that build a strong friendship?
2. How do friendships change over time?
3. What impact does family have during different stages of our lives?
4. What can we learn from different generations?
5. How is conflict an inevitable part of relationships?
6. How do you know if a relationship is healthy or hurtful?
7. What personal qualities help or hinder the formation of relationships?
8. How are people transformed through their relationships with others?
9. What is community and what are the individual's responsibilities to the community as well as the community's responsibilities to the individual?

Shades of Truth

1. Who defines "truth"?
2. How does perspective shape or alter truth?